

*54 Calvin's Church Polity not Democratic.

and circumstances. Cyprian strongly urged that the election is legitimate only when all the members give their assent. History also shows that this rule held good in many places. But as it is scarcely to be expected that so many people would entertain the same feeling, it seems to me desirable that the magistrate, or the council, or the elders, should undertake the election, and that certain bishops (ministers) known for their rectitude and piety should be called to their aid." In the organisation of the Church at Geneva he acted on this principle. The lay element predominated in the presbytery of Geneva, but the lay element was not popularly elected, and the ministers were presented to and approved by the congregation rather than elected by it. Nevertheless, the co-operation of this lay element, though restricted within a somewhat aristocratic limit, was an advance upon the Lutheran Church polity, and marks a wider breach with that of Rome. It realised the idea of some of the more advanced Conciliar reformers of the fifteenth century. Calvin inveighed as bitterly, though not so coarsely, as Luther against the Romish hierarchy as an unwarranted and tyrannical invasion of the rights of the Christian Church. The power of the pope and the hierarchy is the fruit of usurpation, and has no basis whatever in the New Testament or the primitive Church. Christ alone is the head of the Church, though this headship is compatible with the co-operation of the magistrate in things ecclesiastical. The pope is Antichrist, a tyrant, the enemy of Christian liberty, and, in dethroning the pope, the Genevan pope, as he has been called, believed that he was vindicating the rights of the Christian community, if not of the individual. And, in spite of his aristocratic prejudices, he was paving the way for the vindication of a liberty wider than that which he or his generation was able to appreciate.

John Calvin, in common with all the great reformers, has been the object of enthusiastic laudation and bitter invective. Every fair-minded man must recognise his extraordinary intellectual power, his marvellous devotion to and capacity for work, his transcendent influence on the world of his day. Judged by the effects of his labours, political as well as religious, he must be pronounced to be one of those rare men